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ABSTRACT

This brief paper outlines the work of the Tripartite Steering Group on Job Satisfaction, which has set up a series of projects to explore ways in which the content and organization of work could be changed to meet individual needs for satisfaction from work. This is not to ignore the contribution of other features of the work and its environment to the way people feel about it. Indeed, it will be an important feature of the program to explore the effects of changes on attitudes to these features. The projects will be conducted primarily by university departments and research institutes in coordination with the Work Research Unit of the Department of Employment. Trade union representatives should be fully involved in the planning of changes in work organization and job conditions that affect their members. The program started in 1974 and will run for three years. (Author/SE)

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THE JOB SATISFACTION RESEARCH PROGRAMME

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WORK RESEARCH UNIT INFORMATION NOTE NO. 3 MARCH 1975

THE JOB SATISFACTION RESEARCH PROGRAMME

INTRODUCTION

The Tripartite Steering Group on Job Satisfaction (TUC, CBI and Government) was set up in July 1973, and reconvened by the present Government under the chairmanship of Mr John Fraser, Parliamentary Under Secretary in the Department of Employment. One of the initiatives the Group has taken is to set up a series of projects to explore ways in which the content and organisation of work could be changed to meet individual needs for satisfaction from work. The programme stems from one of the major recommendations in the report "On the Quality of Working Life" by Dr N A B Wilson (DE Manpower Paper No 7, June 1973). This called for the addition of a research element to actual examples of changes in the ways in which job tasks are arranged, and the kinds of job that people are expected to do. The kinds of changes dealt with in that Report were introduced to reduce the ill-effects of some of the features of modern work systems on people, and to take account of their increasing demands for intrinsic satisfaction, scope and opportunity for exercising skill. The central focus of the programme will therefore be on the content of jobs, their organisation, and its effect on individual satisfaction. This is not to ignore the contribution of other features of the work and its environment to the way people feel about it. Indeed, it will be an important feature of the programme to explore the effects of changes in work content on attitudes to these other features.

The programme is designed to add a fresh dimension to what is already being done to foster the better use of manpower and to improve the working environment. Current approaches tend to be concerned with helping individuals to adapt to the requirements of jobs whose tasks are, to a large extent, determined by technological and economic considerations. The proposed approach will focus particularly on features of the work itself and its organisation which promote increased satisfaction.

THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME

Practical changes in a variety of work settings will be studied to provide:-

(a) a demonstration of the changes in attitude and in performance as a result of changes in job content;

(b) more information about the kinds of changes that show positive results and in what kinds of work settings. Also how the changes can be brought about and what resources are needed;

(c) a specific improvement in the work situations that are changed during the course of the research;

(d) the development of a nucleus of people with experience in job restructuring. This will include both the external researchers and the personnel within the organisations participating in a change programme.

It is envisaged that the results of the programme will be widely disseminated within industry through publications, conferences and by other means.

By bringing together a number of projects into a programme, it is hoped that, despite the variety of forms and content, it will be possible to go some way in deriving common principles and a set of techniques by which these principles can be applied.

SCOPE OF THE PROGRAMME

The programme will probably include at least half a dozen separate projects involving changes, plus a few subsidiary exercises. Some of the factors influencing the choice of projects are:-

(a) The changes will be designed primarily to improve the quality of working life by attending to features of the work and the way it is organised which are found within the limits of present knowledge to be sources of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

(b) Although improvements in efficiency of performance may be expected, the programme will not be specifically concerned with projects where such improvements are the primary objective.

(c) Emphasis will be given to the careful recording of the steps leading to changes in the work situation and the nature of the change.

(d) Emphasis will also be given to evaluating the effects of the change in a variety of ways including the wider implications for the organisation and the individuals involved.

(e) The organisations in which work changes are carried out must be willing to allow the results of the study to be published.

(f) The projects within the programme will be selected to represent a variety of theoretical approaches.

(g) The locations in which the projects are conducted will represent a variety of industrial, commercial and other work settings.

SPONSORSHIP OF PROJECTS

It is expected that projects will be conducted primarily by university departments and research institutes with financial assistance from the Department where necessary. The programme will be co-ordinated by the Work Research Unit of the Department of Employment. This Unit may also conduct projects within the research programme in addition to its other activities. If the separate projects are to form part of a total programme which, in a few years, will add up to a substantial contribution to the topic, a greater degree of co-ordination between project supervisors and contact with the sponsoring agency will be required than is customary in contracted research. A working party has been set up to co-ordinate the methods of evaluation of the effects of changes introduced in organisations.

Research workers employed in the Job Satisfaction Research Programme will also be expected to occasionally assist the Work Research Unit in its consultancy and training activities. They will be described as "Associates of the Work Research Unit".

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A further precondition of the programme is that trade union representatives

should be fully involved in the planning of changes in work organisation and working conditions that affect their members. The national offices of the relevant trade unions should be informed of the nature of the project.

RESEARCH LOCATIONS

Some firms have already indicated an interest in participating in the research programme and in these cases it may be possible to match the firm with an appropriate researcher in the same region. It is recognised that other researchers have locations where they wish to work or where they have already started work. There is scope for both types of arrangement provided the overall programme includes a fair range of industrial, commercial and other work settings. Some researchers may wish to carry our projects in more than one organisation, and again this is quite possible within the programme.

PROGRESS TO DATE

The first research commission in this programme has been placed with Professor Ray Wild of the Administrative Staff College, Henley. It began in September 1974 and will run for three years. Professor Wild is carrying out projects in the electronics and food processing industries.

A large number of proposals for other research projects had been received by 28 February 1975, the closing date for new applications. These are being evaluated by the research sub committee of the Tripartite Steering Group. It is planned that all those accepted should be commissioned to begin by October 1975 at the latest.